

CORNEAL ABRASION and ULCER



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An open sore of the thin transparent layers that cover the eye. It involves the cornea (covering); conjunctiva (white of the eye); iris (colored part of the eye); and aqueous humor (fluid in the eyeball).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Eye pain, usually severe.
- Sensitivity to bright light.
- Eyelid spasm.
- Tearing.
- Blurred vision.
- Redness in the white of the eye.
- Discharge from the eye.

CAUSES

- Ill-fitting or prolonged use of contact lenses.
- Injury to the cornea or the embedding in the cornea by a foreign body, such as a small piece of steel, sand or glass. A bacterial infection, usually pneumococcal, streptococcal or staphylococcal, may follow the injury.
- Infection by the virus, herpes simplex, that produces cold sores in the mouth.
- Infections of the eyelids and conjunctiva.
- Defective closure of the lid.

All the above infections are contagious from person to person or from one part of the body to another, especially finger-to-eye contact after touching cold sores in the mouth.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Recent infection or eye injury.
- Smoking or other environmental eye irritants.
- Contact lenses (especially soft lenses).
- Hyperthyroidism.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Wash hands frequently.
- Avoid injury. Wear safety goggles to protect eyes when exposed to flying wood shavings or splinters, or metal or stone bits.
- Don't touch your eyes if you have cold sores.
- Handle contact lenses properly.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- A corneal ulcer is a serious eye problem. It is usually curable in 2 to 3 weeks if treated.
- If scars from previous corneal ulcers impair vision significantly, a corneal transplant (grafting a new cornea onto the eye) may make vision nearly normal.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Neglected corneal ulcers may penetrate the cornea, allowing infection to enter the eyeball. This can cause permanent vision loss.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests will include an eye examination, sometimes a visual acuity test, and a laboratory culture study of corneal scraping.
- Treatment will involve removing any foreign body, medications for the eye, a firm compress and an eye patch.
- Apply cool-water compresses to the eye as often as they feel good.

MEDICATIONS

- Antibiotic eye drops, ointments or oral antibiotics for bacterial infections.
- Medication for viral and fungus infections.
- For minor pain, you may use non-prescription drugs such as acetaminophen.

ACTIVITY

After treatment, resume normal activity as soon as possible.

DIET

No special diet.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of a corneal ulcer.
- The following occur during treatment:
 - Fever over 101° F (38.3° C).
 - Pain that is not relieved by acetaminophen.
 - Changed vision.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.